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NEWS RELEASE

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The 2007 Capitol Roundup
by Senator Larry Craig

As I gear up for the next 12 months in the Senate, I thought it would be worth revisiting the accomplishments of the last 12 months. Unfortunately, under Democrat leadership, the 1st Session of the 110th Congress has a pretty short list of achievements. Democrats failed to pass appropriations bills, wasted time trying to force retreat in Iraq, and by their inaction will cause a delay in many tax refunds being sent. Having said that, I and the rest of Idaho's congressional delegation were successful in bringing many positive changes to Idaho.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have fought relentlessly against tax increases. Last year was no exception. My Republican colleagues in the Senate and I successfully removed tax increases Democrats had tacked on to a bill to patch the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) for one year. By approving the AMT patch, more than 23 million Americans were spared a tax increase. And even though Democrats tried to raise taxes elsewhere to "pay for" the patch, they thankfully failed in that effort, too.

Congress also approved an energy bill this year that will require greater fuel efficiency in cars and encourage development of alternative fuels like wind, solar, and biofuels. Once again, however, Democrats tried to capitalize on the widespread support for this positive bill by tacking on nearly \$21 billion in energy production taxes. The result would have been increased costs for consumers trying to fill up their cars or heat their homes, disproportionately affecting the poor. Once again, Republicans successfully held together to prevent this tax increase.

On the appropriations front, Congressman Mike Simpson and I successfully advocated on behalf of a number of Idaho projects. A few highlights of this process were the \$4 million for the naval research facilities at Bayview; \$7.5 million we secured for the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games, to be held in Idaho; \$8.9 million for construction of a new air traffic control tower at the Boise Airport; \$116 million to build the Next Generation Nuclear Plant at the Idaho National Laboratory; and \$513 million for ongoing cleanup efforts at INL.

For Idaho's veterans, there was a significant improvement in the health care they will receive. Many months of groundwork came to fruition, as a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) was opened in Caldwell. The one in Lewiston moved to a larger office and expanded to a five-day work week. And there will be a new CBOC opening in Coeur d'Alene this Spring. Veterans living near these areas will no longer have to drive to Walla Walla, Spokane, or Boise to receive care at a VA facility.

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Idaho's farmers also benefited in 2007, as Congress reauthorized the farm bill, which included a specialty crop subtitle for the first time ever. Over \$2 billion will be available through new or existing programs to assist and support specialty crop producers. I was proud to author this section of the bill and see it included in the final product.

In addition to these achievements, the annual budget deficit for FY 2007 shrank for the fourth year in a row, two Idahoans (Jim Caswell and Randy Smith) were confirmed by the Senate, and we extended the county payments program for one year. Although that one year extension is nearly up, I continue to work with my colleagues for a long-term extension that will treat Idaho's rural communities fairly, without saddling our children and grandchildren with budget deficits or higher taxes.

I expect 2008 will be even more challenging, as presidential campaign politics accentuate the differences between the parties. However, many nagging problems remain that the American people want solved. I'll be dedicated to doing just that.